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## **Does Reported Discrimination in the Military Impact Organizational Factors Differently for Gender, Race, and Rank?**

by

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# **Does Reported Discrimination in the Military Impact Organizational Factors Differently for Gender, Race, and Rank?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Discrimination has been with us since the beginning of time and still plagues our nation today. This project investigated the impact reported discrimination has on views of organizational factors in the military as a function of gender, race, and rank. Not surprisingly, it was found that discrimination does affect views of organizational factors in the military. Results supported the hypothesis that people belonging to groups that have historically been discriminated against (e.g., women and minorities) are impacted less than those of people belonging to groups that have not historically been discriminated against (e.g., white men). A model of the process of discrimination is proposed and discussed in light of the findings.

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**Opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and should not be construed to represent the official position of DEOMI, the military Services, or the Department of Defense**

## Introduction

Organizational effectiveness factors include many elements in the work place. Job commitment, job effectiveness, and job satisfaction are three such elements well documented in the literature. We would assume that these factors are also instrumental in the functioning of the Department of Defense (DoD), one of the largest organizations in the world. With more women and minorities entering the work force, interest in research relating gender and race issues to these organizational factors has increased. Within this area, research has focused primarily on the prevalence of gender problems (e.g., sexual harassment), race problems (racism), and reverse discrimination (e.g., affirmative action). While it is important to document the existence of discrimination, it is also important to focus on the problems that are associated with discrimination. A review of the literature suggests that there are indeed relationships between discrimination and organizational factors (e.g., psychological effects, Rosen, 1998; Pryor, 1995; Culbertson & Rodgers, 1997; Wiener, Hurt, Russell, & Mannen, 1997; job satisfaction, Glomb, Richman, Hulin, Drasgow, Schneider, & Fitzgerald, 1997). Little attention, however, has been focused on how specific groups are impacted differently when discrimination has been experienced. In fact, only after a major incident, such as the Navy's Tailhook scandal involving sexual harassment, did researchers finally begin to recognize this issue as a real problem and undertake more comprehensive investigations. It is this area of research that will be addressed.

It would not be fair to say that the military has not given any attention to the issue of equal opportunity. DoD has been concerned with the issue of discrimination dating back to 1948 when Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Act of 1948 (P.L. 625; Holm, 1992) providing a permanent place for women in the armed forces. Additionally in 1948, President Truman's concerns generated Executive Order 9981 calling for "equality of treatment for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin." More recently the DoD Equal Opportunity Management Institute has been analyzing the military's equal opportunity climate for the past eight years through the administration of the Military Equal Opportunity Climate Survey (Dansby & Landis, 1991). This survey was developed to assess issues such as racist/sexist attitudes and perceptions, along with several factors relating to the work climate such as organizational commitment, perceived mission effectiveness, and job satisfaction. With this information it has been possible to analyze relationships among these factors.

Discrimination can be defined as "the treatment or distinction not based on individual merit in favor of or against a person, group, etc." (Random House College Dictionary, 1982) or a showing of partiality or prejudice in treatment; as specific action or policies directed against the welfare of minority groups (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1988); or by the legal definition, as the disparate treatment of an individual on the basis of race, gender, age, religion, or ethnic origin. Historically, discrimination based on race or gender has been given the most attention. Not so historic in the discrimination literature, but very current, is the idea that legal guidelines for employee selection (e.g., affirmative action) may lead to reverse discrimination. Reverse discrimination is based on preference policies that give advantages to underrepresented groups (e.g., minorities or women). Several cases, especially in the education selection processes, have brought attention to this type of discrimination. At the undergraduate level, the University of Michigan's admission system has been criticized for using a selection system which includes

bonus points for factors including race, which potentially could lower the chances for white applicants (Barnes, 1997). At the graduate level, the University of Texas School of Law has been accused of admitting less qualified minority students over white students with higher admissions scores (Stock, 1996). Even at the high school level, reports of reverse discrimination have been documented. For example, a white female applied to a private high school (Boston Latin) and was rejected. She is now suing the Boston School Committee in Federal court because she discovered she was one of 10 white candidates rejected by the school while 10 black, Asian, and Latino candidates with lower scores were admitted (The Economist, 1998). Other examples of reverse discrimination documented include such areas as employment (Eastland, 1998), and financial aid where whites are unable to apply for particular grants (Raber & Baum, 1997).

Sexual harassment is also considered a type of discrimination and has been categorized in three ways: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989). Fitzgerald and Shullman estimated that about half of the women workers in the U.S. are sexually harassed over the course of their working years. Sexual harassment has received greater public attention since the highly publicized Anita Hill vs. Clarence Thomas case. Recently, the military has also been brought into the public eye with incidences like the Navy Tailhook scandal and the Aberdeen Proving Grounds incident (Piotrkowski, 1998). With the recent attention on sexual harassment, research has focused more on the effects of sexual harassment rather than just on prevalence and incidence. For example, Fitzgerald (1997) found that experiencing sexual harassment has a negative impact on job satisfaction and psychological conditions, and Piotrkowski (1998) cites several studies where sexual harassment has been linked to negative health effects "including gastrointestinal disturbances; headaches; weight loss; nausea; psychological problems such as fear, depression, anxiety, loss of self-esteem and confidence; and so forth..." (pg. 33). Recent studies on organizational factors also appear to be affected by sexual harassment (Culbertson & Rodgers, 1997; Gutek, 1985; Kissman, 1990; O'Farrell & Harlan, 1982; Ragins & Scandura, 1995). Finally, the legal aspects of sexual harassment have been increasingly investigated and critiqued, given the mutable nature of sexual harassment. Legal action can now be initiated charging sexual harassment even if it is not associated with promotions or job security (Andrew, 1997). Sexual harassment of any type that creates a hostile work environment is now seen as a violation of civil rights.

Race discrimination is the third type of discrimination this study will address. It appears the research on race discrimination has not followed the same trend as sex discrimination, which has been focusing more on the impact or effect of discrimination. Much of the research on racism has focused on specific types of racism. For example, Myers and Chan (1995) investigated and found racial discrimination in home mortgage lending, while Keil and Vito (1995) investigated racism in capital punishment. Other areas of research have focused on causes and coping strategies for race discrimination (e.g., Moss & Tilly, 1996). Finally, rank or position, unlike gender and race, can be transient and may or may not be part of a person's self-description. However, people who are in the lower ranks tend to be the victim of discrimination because of their lack of influence or power in the organization (Government Executive, 1997). Given this pattern, most individuals in positions of low rank would come to expect discrimination more than people of higher rank and may develop strategies aimed at

coping with discrimination. Because people in the lower ranks view this as an unstable, transient situation or not part of their self concept, part of their coping strategy may be distancing themselves from their position or hoping for a better position to open elsewhere, thus potentially decreasing their commitment to the organization.

Unfortunately, most research on discrimination has isolated the focus to specific types of discrimination, thereby missing the opportunity to address the possible interactions (differences or similarities) among types of discrimination. While it would be naive to assume all forms of discrimination impact individuals the same, it appears necessary to begin comparing types of discrimination to get a better understanding of the process. For example, do traditional victims (women/minorities) react the same to discrimination as nontraditional victims (white males)? With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to investigate whether discrimination against an individual affects their views of organizational factors differently depending on gender, race, and rank in the military. The organizational factors examined included: organizational commitment, perceived mission effectiveness, job satisfaction, and the perceived overall equal opportunity climate. This research intended to investigate the following questions: Are views of organizational effectiveness factors in the military affected by discrimination against the observer? Does discrimination against a person impact their views of organizational effectiveness factors differently depending on gender, race, or rank? It was hypothesized that traditional victims (women, minorities, and lower rank) would be impacted less by discrimination due to their cultural experiences and expectancies.

## Method

**Participants.** At the time of analysis, there were 715,245 cases in the Military Equal Opportunity Climate Survey (MEOCS) database. The percentage of respondents from each branch of the military was approximately: 15 percent Air Force, 47 percent Army, 16 percent Navy, 12 percent Marine Corps, 3 percent Coast Guard, and 7 percent Federal Civil Service employees. Federal Civil Service employees were not included in the sample database to limit the analyses to military personnel.

**Materials.** Data were generated from the MEOCS results (Dansby & Landis, 1991; Landis, Dansby, and Faley, 1993). The survey has been administered throughout the military for the past eight years (1990-1998) and includes: measures of attitudes and perceptions of discrimination for sexual harassment, racism, and reverse discrimination. It also measures perceptions of the overall equal opportunity climate as well as organizational factors such as organizational commitment, perceived mission effectiveness, and job satisfaction.

**Procedure and Design.** Given the enormous size of the MEOCS database, samples were selected for some of the analyses. Four two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures were used to analyze the respondents' views of organizational effectiveness and overall equal opportunity as a function of the respondent's gender, race, and rank. The three dependent variables which measured organizational effectiveness factors included: organizational commitment, perceived mission effectiveness, and job satisfaction. Also included for comparison were results on the perceived overall equal opportunity climate factor. To determine if discrimination occurred, item 101 from the MEOCS was used. It states, "I have personally

experienced an incident of discrimination (racial, sexual, or sexual harassment) directed at me from military sources (including civilians employed by the military).” Dependent measurement scales included 11 items for organizational commitment, five items for perceived mission effectiveness, and six items for job satisfaction. Overall equal opportunity climate included two items (see Appendix A for items).

## Results

It appears that there is a negative impact when individuals experience discrimination. However, the pertinent question was whether or not this negative impact was different for gender, race, and rank.

### Gender

Not surprisingly, women (54.6%) in the military are significantly more likely to report having personally experienced some type of discrimination compared to men (30%),  $\chi^2(1, N=565617) = 21495.86, p < .001$ . However, views of all the organizational effectiveness factors investigated in this study were impacted less for women by discrimination than for men (see Table 1 for summary). Four, two-way ANOVA indicated that mean scores for commitment to the service  $F(3,565260) = 190.10, p < .001$ , perceived mission effectiveness  $F(3,564666) = 210.83, p < .001$ , job satisfaction  $F(3,564776) = 112.59, p < .001$ , and perception of the overall equal opportunity climate  $F(3,564241) = 909.95, p < .001$  were impacted more for men than for women who reported they had been discriminated against.

Table 1. Negative Impact Discrimination has on Views of Organizational Factors in the Military by Gender

	Responded “YES” to Discrimination			Responded “NO” to Discrimination			Negative Impact from Discrimination
<b>Women</b>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	
Commitment	3.00	.87	52650	3.31	.83	43841	-.31
Mission Effectiveness	3.84	.95	52590	3.98	.89	43794	-.13
Job Satisfaction	3.59	.86	52605	3.81	.81	43802	-.21
OEOC	2.98	1.08	52575	3.45	1.01	43742	-.47
<b>Men</b>							
Commitment	2.91	.87	140573	3.31	.86	328200	-.40
Mission Effectiveness	3.76	.99	140381	3.99	.88	327902	-.23
Job Satisfaction	3.48	.88	140405	3.75	.83	327965	-.27
OEOC	2.96	1.08	140318	3.65	.97	327607	-.69

## Race

Also not surprisingly, minorities reported more discrimination (45.9%) compared to the majority (27.1%),  $\chi^2(1,580720) = 21429$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, some noticeable interactions occur when women and men are factored in by race. Fifty-five percent of nonwhite, enlisted women and 57% of white enlisted women report personally experiencing discrimination compared to 44% of nonwhite men and 24% of white men. The same is true for officers with 58.8% of nonwhite women and 52.2% of white women reporting discrimination compared to 42% of nonwhite men and only 13.4% of white men. Thus, the real difference exists between the majority (white men) and minority men and all women.

Similar to gender results, it was the majority member's views of organizational effectiveness factors that were impacted more by discrimination than minority members (see Table 2 for a summary). Specifically, organizational commitment  $F(3,580353) = 401.56$ ,  $p < .001$ , perceived mission effectiveness  $F(3,579692) = 302.53$ ,  $p < .001$ , job satisfaction  $F(3,579810) = 452.10$ ,  $p < .001$ , and overall perception of equal opportunity  $F(3,579191) = 10.78$ ,  $p < .01$  changed significantly more for the majority when experiencing discrimination compared to minority personnel.

Table 2. Negative Impact of Discrimination on Views of Organizational Factors in the Military by Race

	Responded "YES" to Discrimination			Responded "NO" to Discrimination			Negative Impact from Discrimination
Minority	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	
Commitment	2.89	.80	103430	3.18	.77	122019	-.28
Mission Effectiveness	3.69	.99	103249	3.82	.95	121854	-.13
Job Satisfaction	3.49	.89	103281	3.68	.86	121899	-.19
OEOC	2.75	1.04	103166	3.30	.98	121622	-.55
Majority							
Commitment	2.98	.92	96354	3.37	.88	258551	-.39
Mission Effectiveness	3.83	.98	96239	4.04	.86	258351	-.21
Job Satisfaction	3.49	.87	96257	3.78	.82	258374	-.29
OEOC	3.20	1.07	96211	3.76	.94	258193	-.56

## Rank

Finally, enlisted personnel report being discriminated against more (35.7%) than officers (27.7%),  $\chi^2(1,548481) = 2258.80$ ,  $p < .001$ . Once again, concerning views of organizational factors and EO, it is the group who is more likely to experience discrimination that appears to be impacted less, and the group who is less likely to experience discrimination less that appears to be impacted the most (see Table 3 for summary). Organizational commitment  $F(3,548152) =$



59.16,  $p < .001$ , perceived mission effectiveness,  $F(3,547560) = 397.16$ ,  $p < .001$ , job satisfaction  $F(3,547644) = 230.95$ ,  $p < .001$ , and perception of the overall equal opportunity climate  $F(3,547083) = 489.31$ ,  $p < .001$  changed significantly more for officers when experiencing discrimination compared to enlisted members. (Breakdown for gender, race, and rank can be seen in Appendix B.)

Table 3. Negative Impact Discrimination has on Organizational Factors in the Military by Rank

	Responded "YES" to Discrimination			Responded "NO" to Discrimination			Negative Impact from Discrimination
<b>Officer</b>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	
Job Commitment	3.24	.82	26566	3.63	.81	69407	-.39
Mission Effectiveness	3.85	.98	26513	4.17	.83	69368	-.32
Job Satisfaction	3.61	.89	26534	3.93	.80	69361	-.32
OEOC	3.19	1.17	26487	3.96	1.00	69288	-.77
<b>Enlisted</b>							
Job Commitment	2.89	.86	161393	3.23	.84	290787	-.34
Mission Effectiveness	3.75	.98	161181	3.92	.90	290499	-.17
Job Satisfaction	3.49	.88	161206	3.71	.83	290547	-.22
OEOC	2.94	1.04	161130	3.54	.95	290179	-.60

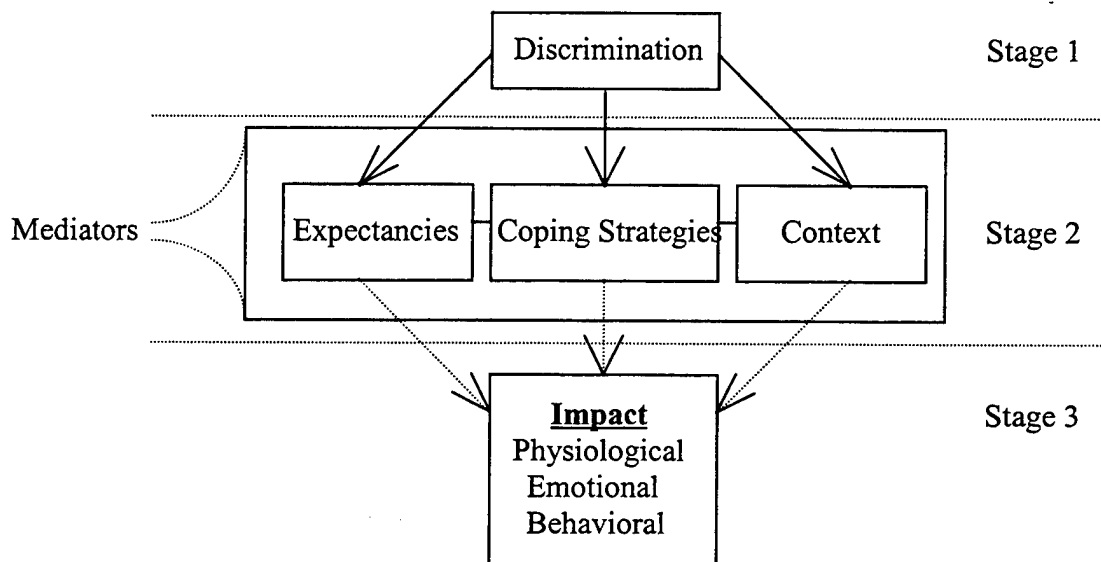
## Discussion

Results of this study should be viewed with caution because of the following limitations. Many potential confounding variables may have contributed to the differences found in the present study. Foulis and McCabe (1997), for example, found that age, occupation, and attitudes about sexual harassment, and gender roles were found to predict experience of sexual harassment. Also, these differences may be heavily influenced by the racial make up of the military. Other limitations may include inaccurate responses from respondents, especially those involving sexual harassment. Much of the literature on sexual harassment discusses the problems with what constitutes sexual harassment and what does not. It would be unwise to assume all responses were accurate accounts of discrimination. However, even inaccurate accounts of discrimination may still have the same effect depending on the way the person interpreted and processed the incident.

Results lend some support to the hypothesis that people who have had more experience with, and more expectations of, discrimination (women and minorities) would be impacted to a lesser extent than those who did not have experience with or expectations of discrimination. This acknowledges the need to investigate further the process individuals go through after experiencing discrimination. Given the findings in this study, the following model proposes the process individuals go through when experiencing discrimination.

**Process of Discrimination:** Discrimination involves a process by which individuals experience a stressful stimulus, interpret and process that stimulus, and then react or respond to it. To examine this in more detail, Figure 1 illustrates the stages people go through when confronted with discrimination. During the first stage the actual process of detection takes place. For some, discrimination is easily detected, and for others detection is more ambiguous. For instance, women may detect a gender bias or derogatory remark as a clear-cut case of discrimination whereas some men might find this an instance of everyday normal conversation. The second stage, called the mediation stage, occurs after the detection of discrimination takes place. This stage involves the process by which individuals examine the discrimination and interpret it given their past experiences and expectations. Their coping skills or strategies, and even the context of the situation, can have powerful effects on how individuals interpret discrimination. For example, when is it, or is it ever, okay to joke about race or gender? Can a man come on to a woman in one setting and be perceived as normal but be condemned for behaving the same way in another? If so, who decides the context in which it is appropriate and when it is not? Thus, how discrimination is internalized becomes very complicated due to the nature of the mediators. The third and final stage is how individuals react or respond to their interpretation of discrimination. This could involve physiological, emotional, or behavioral reactions. For example, people who have had a history of oppression and discrimination may expect it and have developed better coping skills. Although they interpret the discrimination accurately, they have less reaction to it. On the other hand, individuals who have not experienced discrimination historically, such as white men, may suffer a loss in self-esteem, increased health problems, and higher alternative job seeking behavior.

Figure 1. Three Stages in the Process of Discrimination



While these findings are preliminary, it is a compelling area that needs further investigation. Future research should focus on controlling more variables and investigating each component of the above-mentioned model. Also, looking at specific race and gender interactions is a plausible next step. There is still a need to focus on interventions for decreasing both the occurrence and impact of discrimination.

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## Appendix A

### **How experience of discrimination was determined**

#### Item 101 of MEOCS

I have personally experienced an incident of discrimination (racial, sexual, sexual harassment, age, disability, religion, national origin, or color) directed at me from military sources (including civilians employed by the military).

### **Items for making up each factor from MEOCS**

#### Organizational Commitment items

51. I would accept almost any type of assignment in order to stay in this organization.
52. I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar.
53. I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.
54. I could just as well be working in another organization as long as the type of work was similar.
55. I feel very little loyalty to this organization.
56. This organization really inspires me to perform my job in the very best manner possible.
57. It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave this organization.
58. I am extremely glad to be part of this organization compared to other, similar Organizations that I could be in.
59. Assuming I could stay, there's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization to retirement.
60. Often, I find it difficult to agree with the policies of this organization on important matters relating to its people.
61. For me, this organization is the best of all possible ways to serve my country.

62. Becoming part of this organization was definitely not a good move for me.

Perceived Mission Effectiveness items

63. The amount of output of my work group is very high.

64. The quality of output of my work group is very high.

65. When high priority work arises, such as short suspense's, crash programs, and schedule changes, the people in my work group do an outstanding job in handling these situations.

66. My work group always gets maximum output from available resources (e.g., personnel and materials).

67. My work group's performance in comparison to similar work groups is very high.

Job Satisfaction items

68. The chance to help people & improve their welfare through the performance of my job.

69. My amount of effort compared to the effort of my co-workers.

70. The recognition and pride my family has in the work I do.

71. My job security.

72. The chance to acquire valuable skills in my job that prepare me for future opportunities.

73. My job as a whole.

## Appendix B

Effects of Discrimination on Organizational Effectiveness factors in the Military by Gender, Race, and Rank

Race/Gender	<u>Enlisted</u>			<u>Officer</u>		
	Experienced Discrimination		Negative Effect	Experienced Discrimination		Negative Effect
	Yes	No		Yes	No	
<b>Minority Women</b>						
Job Commitment	3.10	3.24	-.14	2.80	3.10	-.30
Mission Effectiveness	3.71	3.77	-.06	3.77	3.84	-.07
Job Satisfaction	3.55	3.69	-.14	3.57	3.69	-.12
OEOC	2.55	2.98	-.43	2.70	3.20	-.50
<b>Majority Women</b>						
Job Commitment	3.39	3.67	-.28	3.06	3.40	-.34
Mission Effectiveness	4.08	4.20	-.12	3.87	3.99	-.12
Job Satisfaction	3.82	4.04	-.22	3.60	3.83	-.23
OEOC	3.58	3.98	-.40	3.19	3.64	-.45
<b>Minority Men</b>						
Job Commitment	3.17	3.43	-.26	2.87	3.16	-.29
Mission Effectiveness	3.72	3.98	-.26	3.72	3.85	-.13
Job Satisfaction	3.55	3.80	-.25	3.51	3.70	-.19
OEOC	2.86	3.50	-.64	2.78	3.34	-.56
<b>Majority Men</b>						
Job Commitment	3.36	3.73	-.37	2.87	3.26	-.39
Mission Effectiveness	4.04	4.28	-.24	3.76	3.97	-.21
Job Satisfaction	3.69	4.01	-.32	3.42	3.71	-.29
OEOC	3.70	4.19	-.49	3.10	3.66	-.56